

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003521

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: CHEN SHUI-BIAN MAKES PROVOCATIVE OFF-THE-CUFF

REMARKS

REF: TAIPEI 3409

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David J. Keegan, Reason: 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: During an open-press November 7 speech to a group of pro-independence university professors, President Chen Shui-bian emphasized Taiwan as a "sovereign and independent country" and asserted that Taiwan's current constitution was "made in China, for China" and was not appropriate for Taiwan. Chen shared the stage at the event with former President Lee Teng-hui, who told the audience that Taiwan needed to elect a Pan-Green majority on December 11 so it could change the constitution to create a "Republic of Taiwan." Senior aides to the president say they were surprised by Chen's comments, which they did not write, and they speculate that Chen was once more playing to the crowd. Officials assert that they will try to limit the fallout on cross-Straits relations by having the president offer more concrete gestures of goodwill in upcoming public speeches. However, these same officials fear that Chen will make further destabilizing statements while on the Legislative Yuan (LY) campaign trail in the lead up to the December 11 election. The formulations floated by Chen on November 7 are likely to further increase suspicions in Beijing that Chen is pursuing a hidden independence agenda in concert with Lee Teng-hui. End Summary.

Chen Falls Off the Wagon

12. (C) President Chen Shui-bian emphasized Taiwan's sovereignty during a November 7 speech to the pro-independence Taiwan Association of University Professors. Chen asserted that "we have 23 million people, a territory, a government, an army... if you say this is not a sovereign, independent country, what is it? Taiwan is a country, Taiwan is a beautiful country, Taiwan is an advanced country, Taiwan is a great country." To drive home the point, Chen added that "Taiwan is a sovereign and independent country and no person or country can deny this fact." Chen bemoaned, however, that Taiwan's 23 million people could not enjoy 100 percent sovereignty because of unique historical factors and "China's unfeeling suppression."

13. (C) Chen went on to criticize the "Republic of China Constitution currently in use in Taiwan." He stated that this constitution was not established "in Taiwan or for Taiwan," but rather was "established in China and for China." For this reason, Chen pledged to complete a "major reform of the constitutional system" (wancheng xianzheng da gaige) to produce a "New Taiwan Constitution" (Xin Taiwan Xianfa). Much of the rest of his speech was devoted to criticizing "those people" in Taiwan who have spent the past four years trying to undermine the Chen administration in order to curry favor with China. He said that some even held up the "enemy country" (diguo) as their "mother country" (zuguo). These same people, Chen continued, also remain confused over Taiwan's history and geography, believing that "China and Mongolia" are parts of "our country's" (benguo) territory. Chen stated that "we all know that the People's Republic of China is a different country and the Republic of Mongolia is a different country, they are not our country." (Note: The Liberty Times reported that Chen used the term "China" (Zhongguo), while the Presidential Office transcript and most other media outlets quote him as referring to the "People's Republic of China." End Note.)

14. (C) Speaking at the same event, former President Lee Teng-hui offered a similar line on Taiwan's history and sovereignty. Lee argued that only if the Pan-Green wins a majority on December 11 can Taiwan create a new constitution that will "correct" Taiwan's official name. Both Lee and Chen praised the sponsoring organization's work to promote awareness of Taiwan's democratic reforms and sovereignty.

Chen Advisors Express Surprise, Annoyance

15. (C) Senior Chen aides expressed surprise, even annoyance, over the president's November 7 comments. National Security Council (NSC) Senior Advisor for cross-Straits affairs Chen Chung-hsin said that NSC Secretary General Chiou I-jen had scheduled a meeting on November 8 to discuss how to keep the

president from going beyond his brief during 40 planned campaign appearances scheduled to start on November 12. According to Chen, Chiou read about the president's remarks in the papers the morning after they were made. "Chiou said he thought we still had a week to plan how to prevent exactly this sort of thing from occurring," Chen added.

16. (C) Longtime presidential senior speechwriter Lin Jin-chang told AIT that the president was not speaking off a prepared text. "He got some talking points on educational reform, but apparently decided to discard them and talk off the cuff," Lin added. Lin speculated that Chen "got carried away by the audience and Lee Teng-hui." The NSC's Chen said that in order to limit the damage from the November 7 remarks, the president agreed to a suggestion by Chiou that he give a series of more conciliatory public statements. Chen said that the president expressed a willingness to "flesh out some of the concepts from his October 10 National Day speech" in order to ease PRC fears. Speechwriter Lin acknowledged that the November 7 speech would damage the president's credibility with Beijing, but offered that it could have been worse. "At least he didn't say this at a formal occasion," Lin asserted, adding that "Beijing should realize that these were just informal comments to a group of fundamentalists." (Comment: Lin is among the president's three longest serving confidantes and author of virtually all of Chen's major speeches over the past decade. His apparent belief that public messages can be compartmentalized for different audiences track quite closely with the president's long-standing practice. End Comment.)

KMT: Chen Toying with Independence

17. (C) KMT Spokesman Chang Jung-kung publicly criticized the president on November 8 for saying different things to different audiences and called on Chen to "go ahead and insert the 'State-to-State theory' into the constitution." Chang also assailed the president's comments on Taiwan's geographical definition, asserting that the "country's" borders should be seen in historical terms, not just from the perspective of what the government currently administers.

Comment: Political Ploy or Ideological Commitment?

18. (S) Chen's November 7 comments are disturbing regardless of whether or not you believe the alibi provided by our NSC contacts. If Chen were simply caught up in the emotion of the crowd, we may be in store for another rough period between now and the election on December 11. It is likely that Beijing will take the even less charitable, but perhaps as plausible, view that Chen's November 7 remarks reflect his true thinking, or at least the thinking of the majority within his own political base. While Chen did not explicitly contradict his May 20 pledge not to touch on sovereignty definitions during the upcoming round of constitutional reforms, his formulations certainly suggests where his sympathies lie. Senior Chen administration officials, including his Vice President, Premier, and Foreign Minister, have been more than willing to voice interpretations of the president's intentions very different than those provided to us by Chen's scripted messages and the more pragmatic advisors who wrote them.

19. (S) Chen's November 7 remarks once again raises serious questions over the president's willingness to level with elements of his own base in pursuit of broader regional security interests. The inability (or unwillingness) of Taiwan's opposition parties to offer a credible alternative to the DPP has shifted the political balance away from where it once lay. Responsibility for putting down markers on how far Taiwan can push the independence agenda may increasingly fall on our shoulders. The reactions to Secretary Powell's recent interviews in Beijing (Reftel) and to President Bush's December 9, 2003 warning against unilateral changes to the status quo both demonstrate that the Taiwan public takes USG views seriously. AIT will continue to press Chen administration officials on the need for restraint in private. Public warnings from Washington will also be an important tool for reminding Taiwan's politicians and people that there are limits to our tolerance for this kind of provocative talk.
PAAL